



Early Warning, Timely Response

A Guide to Safe Schools

Although most schools are safe, the violence that occurs in our neighborhoods and communities has found its way inside the schoolhouse door. However, if we understand what leads to violence and the types of support that research has shown are effective in preventing violence, we can make our schools safer.

Research-based practices can help school communities—administrators, teachers, families, students, support staff, and community members—recognize the warning signs early, so children can get the help they need before it is too late. This guide presents a brief summary of the research on violence prevention and intervention and crisis response in schools. It tells school communities:

- **What to look for**—the early warning signs that relate to violence and other troubling behaviors.
- **What to do**—the action steps that school communities can take to prevent violence and other troubling behaviors, to intervene and get help for troubled children, and to respond to school violence when it occurs.

Sections in this guide include:

- **Section 1: Introduction.** All staff, students, parents, and members of the community must be part of creating a safe school environment. Schools must have in place approaches for addressing the needs of all children who have troubling behaviors. This section describes the rationale for the guide and suggests how it can be used by school communities to develop a plan of action.
- **Section 2: Characteristics of a School That Is Safe and Responsive to All Children.** Well functioning schools foster learning, safety, and socially appropriate behaviors. They have a strong academic focus and support students in achieving high standards, foster positive relationships between school staff and students, and promote meaningful parental and community involvement. This section describes characteristics of schools that support prevention, appropriate intervention, and effective crisis response.
- **Section 3: Early Warning Signs.** There are early warning

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signs that, when viewed in context, can signal a troubled child. Educators and parents—and in some cases, students—can use several significant principles to ensure that the early warning signs are not misinterpreted. This section presents early warning signs, imminent warning signs, and the principles that ensure these signs will not be misinterpreted. It concludes with a brief description of using the early warning signs to shape intervention practices.

- **Section 4: Getting Help for Troubled Children.** Effective interventions for improving the behavior of troubled children are well documented in the research literature. This section presents research- and expert-based principles that should provide the foundation for all intervention development. It describes what to do when intervening early with students who are at risk for behavioral problems, when responding with intensive interventions for individual children, and when providing a foundation to prevent and reduce violent behavior.
- **Section 5: Developing a Prevention and Response Plan.** Effective schools create a violence prevention and response plan and form a team that can ensure it is implemented. They use approaches and strategies based on research about what

works. This section offers suggestions for developing such plans.

- **Section 6: Responding to Crisis.** Effective and safe schools are well prepared for any potential crisis or violent act. This section describes what to do when intervening during a crisis to ensure safety and when responding in the aftermath of crisis. The principles that underlie effective crisis response are included.
- **Section 7: Conclusion.** This section summarizes the guide.
- **Section 8: Methodology, Contributors, and Research Support.** This guide synthesizes an extensive knowledge base on violence and violence prevention. This section describes the rigorous development and review process that was used. It also provides information about the project's Web site.

A final section lists resources that can be contacted for more information.

The information in this guide is not intended as a comprehensive prevention, intervention, and response plan—school communities could do *everything* recommended and still experience violence. Rather, the intent is to provide school communities with reliable and practical information about what they can do to be prepared and to reduce the likelihood of violence.

